

Tending to the Tutor's Toolbox: Addressing Embodiment, Incorporating Kinesthetic Instruction, and Training for Mental Health

The writing center tutor skillset is ever changing and the amount of “tools” in which the tutor has access to follows suit. The writing center tutor must keep their “tools” sharp and their toolbox up to date. This panel of four tutor-scholars seeks to enhance the existing toolbox of our writing center tutors. We explicate this through three different avenues (abstracts below): embodiment as a tutor, kinesthetic learning/tutoring, and addressing mental health within sessions.

Panel Part One:

(AD)Dressing the Part: Graduate Tutor Embodiment and Dress/Codes

At our center, graduate tutors are also graduate teaching assistants or instructors; therefore, graduate tutors embody conflicting roles on campus: instructor and peer-tutor. A lot of prior work has been done exploring this tension (Conroy, Lerner, and Siska; Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, and Boquet; Ianetta, McCamley, and Quick), and in the past two years embodiment has included exploring the modality and rhetoric of dress (The Peer Review 2018 CFP; Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics 2018 CFP).

Using insights from Denny's “Queering the Writing Center,” navigating the tension outlined in Rollins, Smith, and Westbrook's “Collusion and Collaboration: Concealing Authority in the Writing Center,” and using the framework from Grouling-Snider and Buck's “Colleagues, Classmates, and Friends: Graduate versus Undergraduate Tutor Identities and Professionalism” this introductory research project will explore the ways graduate tutors navigate and construct their conflicting identities/roles on campus through the modality of dress/codes. This will include a semi-structured interview of current graduate tutors in our center that will explore how their choices of dress on a daily basis reflect their different roles on campus.

Panel Part Two:

“This is not a moment, it's the movement”: Incorporating Moments for Movement in Writing Centers

The question of Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences in learning styles has been widely discussed in the fields of education as well as writing centers, with scholars, such as Libby Miles, et al., Stacey Brown, and Marilee Sprenger, addressing various methods for teachers and tutors to differentiate instruction. These works, however, have not adequately addressed the issue of how to differentiate successfully for kinesthetic learners in writing centers. My project addresses the issue of how writing centers can effectively and easily implement strategies for their toolbox in order to cater to all three subtypes of kinesthetic learners: “hands-on learners,” “whole-body learners,” and “doodlers” (Sprenger 38). Specifically, in my project, I will be looking at how the Ball State University Writing Center can implement strategies to help these students. I will provide writing center tutors explicit and practical methods for differentiating their tutor sessions for kinesthetic learners, such as using tinker toys, mind mapping, walk-through essays, and more. In conclusion, by closely examining kinesthetic teaching strategies, this project sheds new light on the rarely acknowledged issue of differentiated instruction based on Gardner's multiple intelligences.

Panel Part Three:

Compassion, Company, and Psychology: Realizing an Expanded Role and Preparedness for the “Counseling” Tutor to Handle Psychological Stress

The role of tutors, their defined responsibilities, and training needed to manage the varying levels of psychological stress that clients bring into sessions have been in debate by many scholars (Suffredini; Murphy; Johnson). However, these works neglect to offer any practical method in which to train tutors to handle the sometimes intense, emotional client and the psychological stress that they bring into the session with them. This paper addresses an improvement to tutor training for emotionally intense sessions with attention to the medical consultation method seen in therapist settings (Gask and Usherwood). In this project, I will examine multiple experiential sessions involving clients with various levels of psychological stress and extrapolate the medical consultation method to demonstrate the importance of a counseling approach for tutors within sessions. I argue to position the writing center as a crucial gateway in improving student confidence, idea of self-worth, and social activeness—and that to neglect the counseling aspect of tutoring is to intrinsically perform a disservice to the client and the writing process. In conclusion, this project, by closely examining multiple sessions and how they could be improved through the medical consultation method, offers a feasible, practical way to implement tutor training to handle the often intense, emotional sessions tutors will encounter.